



For Immediate Release  
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## **Study looks at effects of WorkFirst activities on employment, child care for welfare-to-work families**

OLYMPIA – Washington state today released two new reports as part of a long-term study of families moving from welfare to work.

The findings are the latest in a comprehensive study by university researchers and the state to determine how thousands of families are faring under WorkFirst, Washington's five-year-old welfare reform program.

Researchers described the effects of WorkFirst activities and support services on employment and earnings for 1,330 families selected from the October 2000 welfare rolls.

They also looked at child care arrangements for children of those parents, as well as for 3,037 families chosen from the March 1999 welfare rolls.

The study showed that WorkFirst's Job Search workshop and training programs likely help welfare recipients get better-paying jobs.

"While the gains are modest, research does suggest that these structured activities help increase earnings and in some cases the likelihood of finding work," said Marieka Klawitter, associate professor of public affairs at the University of Washington and head of the study analysis team.

Researchers estimated that welfare recipients were 11 percent more likely to be employed after participating in WorkFirst's Job Search workshop, and earned an average of \$114 per month more than they would have without the workshop.

The 30-hour workshop is usually the first step in a structured 12-week program called Job Search. Participation is monitored and participants are encouraged to dress and prepare as if they were reporting to work.

Other Job Search activities without the workshop were not shown to significantly increase employment or earnings, however.

Short-term training to help parents prepare for a specific job was shown to have similar benefits. Researchers estimated that welfare recipients earned an average of \$209 per month more than they would have without the training.

Other findings showed that slightly more than half of the children in families surveyed received state child-care subsidies in the summer.

More than half of families not receiving subsidized child care said they had no need for it. However, about a third said that it was a hassle to apply and up to 15 percent said they weren't aware of the service.

Overall, 70 percent of parents surveyed reported they were very satisfied with their child care arrangements.

Most children 13 and under were cared for by the parent or a relative, while about a fifth were enrolled in a licensed child care center or other formal arrangement.

Additional findings from the study show:

- The proportion of families receiving welfare fell steadily. Sixty percent of 1,330 families selected from the October 2000 welfare rolls were receiving assistance a year later.
- About 40 percent of those on assistance were working, while 65 percent of those who had left welfare were employed.
- The average wage for families on assistance, including those not working, was \$650 per quarter. Survey respondents who left welfare for work or other reasons earned higher wages, about \$2,200, during the same period.
- Survey respondents who completed the Job Search workshop earned an average of about \$2,100 in the last three months of 2001. Those who completed pre-employment training earned an average of \$2,562.
- Most parents paid less than \$50 a month for child care.
- Over time, parents were more likely to use formal child care. Researchers said this might reflect a switch to formal care as parents go to work.

Findings are from a five-year survey that is a collaborative effort of the University of Washington, Washington State University and the state's WorkFirst partners: Department of Social and Health Services, Employment Security Department, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development.

Surveys were initially conducted with more than 3,000 families randomly selected from the March 1999 welfare rolls. Since then, additional adults have been added to the study to provide a view of how the characteristics of families on welfare are changing.

Study reports and additional information about WorkFirst are available on the WorkFirst Web site at [www.wa.gov/workfirst](http://www.wa.gov/workfirst).

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